

A SHORT HISTORY OF THE CORINTH RIFLES AND THEIR FLAG

by

James C. Harris

The first military company from Corinth to answer the call by the State of Mississippi for troops, and one of the first units to be ordered into Confederate service was the "Corinth Rifles".¹ This company, consisting of eighty-five officers and men, was organized by William H. Kilpatrick, a 41 year-old lawyer from Corinth.² Kilpatrick, who later became a circuit judge and mayor of Corinth,³ recruited from a wide cross-section and diversity of vocations within the western part of Old Tishomingo (now Alcorn) County. In the company's ranks were lawyers, farmers, storekeepers, clerks, a plow maker, carpenter, tinner, mail agent, brick mason, school teacher, real estate agent, physician, hotel proprietor, minister, and circuit court clerk.⁴

On Wednesday, 9 January 1861, the State of Mississippi seceded from the Union in anticipation of an open conflict with the North, being the second of eleven southern states to do so. The "Corinth Rifles" was obviously formed within days of that historic event. This organization is mentioned in the *Corinth Herald* as early as 12 January. It was at this time that the company was called upon to serve as an honor guard for the festivities surrounding the linking at Corinth of the Mobile and Ohio with the Memphis and Charleston railroads. This event marked for the first time the joining of Mobile and Memphis by a direct rail line and was to add to Corinth's strategical importance for both North and South during the ensuing conflict.⁵

The company continued to grow in strength as new recruits were added almost daily. One of the highlights of pre-war Corinth society was gathering on the large lawn of the Corona Female College to watch the Corinth Rifles perform their drills and ceremonies.⁶ From Mrs. F. A. Inge's comments in *Memories of 1861-62*, the unit apparently adapted and had uniforms made for themselves of cadet grey material for just such occasions.

In mid-January, the men of the company conducted an election of officers.⁷ To no one's surprise, its organizer, William Hobson Kilpatrick, was elected its first captain; with James T. Vaughan, a brick mason, selected as first lieutenant; Francis E. Whitfield, a 21

year old lawyer, second lieutenant; James K. Dobbins, 26 year old merchant, third lieutenant; and Daniel Q. Allen, 22 year old lawyer, designated as its first sergeant.⁸

Events now began to move rapidly. On 28 January, Richard Griffith, a representative of the Military Bureau of Mississippi, came to Corinth and enrolled the Corinth Rifles into state service as an infantry company for a period of twelve (12) months.⁹ Optimism was contagious in these early days of pending conflict and it was commonly felt that the war would last at most only a very few months. The Southern authorities believed with certainty the North would have little interest in a long drawn out war and planned their strategies accordingly.

On 20 February, just two days after Jefferson Davis' inauguration, the Corinth Rifles was mustered into the army of the newly formed Confederate States of America as Co. C, 2nd Regt., 4th Brig. Mississippi Volunteers.¹⁰

On Sunday afternoon, 10 March 1861, the ladies of Corinth presented the unit with a unique and beautiful handmade, 4' x 5' silk flag of the First National design, which had been adopted just days before 4 March by the Confederate Congress as the first official flag.¹¹ The flag featured, on its reverse field, a finely painted magnolia tree in full bloom (symbolic of the State of Mississippi), with the motto "THIS WE WILL DEFEND", within a red painted ribbon running along the bottom edge of the blue field. The words, "CORINTH RIFLES", the unit's chosen designation, was positioned above the magnolia tree. The obverse blue field was filled with seven painted gold stars encircling the statement, "PRESENTED BY THE LADIES OF CORINTH". The seven stars were significant of the seven original Cotton States which had rallied to the Confederate cause up to that point: South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas. A very impressive ceremony was held at Corona Female College, the social hub of the community, in which Miss Lydia Mitchell, a local student, made the formal flag presentation on behalf of the la-

dies of Corinth to Captain Kilpatrick and Private George W. Small, the unit's color bearer. Captain Kilpatrick accepted the flag for the unit with a very appropriate and stirring oration.¹²

The next week the unit received orders to report to Mobile, Alabama, for active duty. After a rousing send-off by the citizenry of Corinth, the company boarded a train attired in their new grey uniforms carrying their beautiful new silk banner which waved vigorously in the stiff March breeze.¹³

Upon arrival at Mobile, the company was re-directed to the army's new organizational and instructional camp at Pensacola, Florida. There they were put into camp near Ft. Barrancas, opposite Ft. Pickens, the Union-held fortification on Santa Rosa Island. It is in this general locality that they were to spend the next nine (9) months guarding the Southern Coast line of the newly formed Confederacy and training for war.¹⁴

Because of the primitive living conditions in this hastily constructed camp, many members of the "Corinth Rifles" became desperately ill, necessitating the hospitalization of some, and retirement from further military service for others. Some others, less fortunate, died without having had the opportunity to fire a hostile shot.¹⁵

By 15 March 1861, according to a minute book maintained by Captain Robert McGowan of Co. F (a sister unit), twenty independent companies from Mississippi, including the Corinth Rifles, had arrived at Pensacola. A typical day in camp according to Captain McGowan's notes consisted of the following schedule: Reveille at 5:30 a.m., breakfast at 6:30, sick call at 7:00, guard mounting at 7:30, drill at 8:30, recall at 10:00, dinner at 12:00 (noon), drill again at 3:30 p.m., recall at 5:00, retreat at 6:00, and tattoo at 9:00.¹⁶

The month of April was spent in forming these twenty independent infantry units into two regiments and these regiments into the beginning of the Army of Pensacola under command of Brigadier General Braxton Bragg. The Corinth Rifles were consolidated into the newly designated 9th Mississippi Infantry Regiment along with three companies from DeSoto County, three companies from Marshall County, two from Panola County, and one from Lafayette County, and was afforded the appropriate distinction of being assigned as Company "A".¹⁷

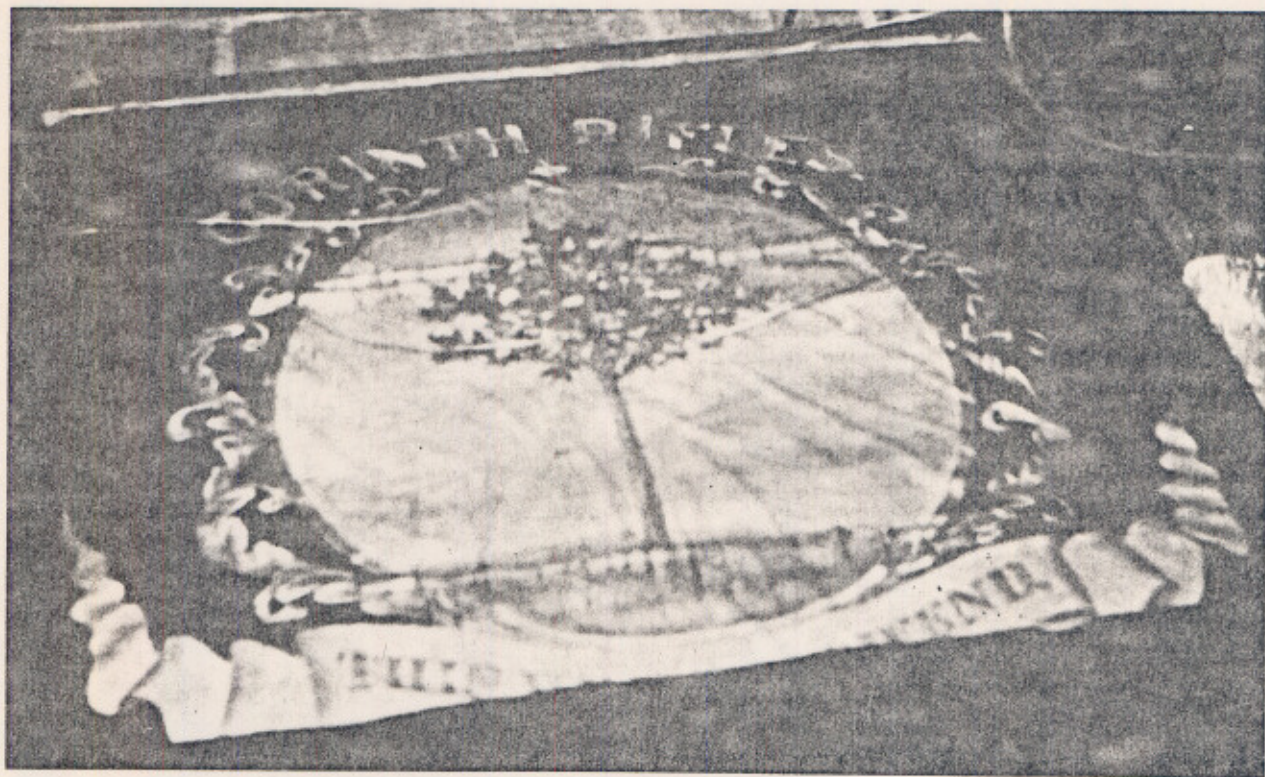
After all this preliminary activity, an election was conducted on 11 April by the member companies to select regimental officers. The Honorable James R.

Chalmers of DeSoto County was elected colonel; after a somewhat heated and lengthy balloting for lieutenant colonel, James L. Autry of Marshall County was elected; Albert R. Bowdre of Panola County was elected major; and Francis Eugene Whitfield of the Corinth Rifles, regimental adjutant. At the conclusion of the organizational processes, the newly formed 9th Miss. Regt. was formally inducted into the Confederate Army on 17 April 1861, and as such held the distinction of being the first Mississippi regiment to be so accepted.¹⁸ It should be noted that all of these events took place before the firing on Ft. Sumpter or the secession of the States of Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and Tennessee.

For the next nine months the regiment involved itself in drilling and performing guard duty, with the exception of a small but heated skirmish with the Union garrison on Santa Rosa Island. Despite this lackluster beginning, General Bragg saw great potential in the leadership and ability of the 9th Regiment and hand-picked it to be assigned to his "new command being formed for transfer to the interior (North Mississippi)", along with the Louisiana Regulars Regiment and the 5th Georgia.¹⁹

By 17 December 1861, upon expiration of their initial twelve month enlistment, Colonel Chalmers opted to form a new regiment, it, too, being designated the (New) 9th Mississippi Regiment. This new regiment, however, was to be enlisted for the remainder of the war.²⁰ The Confederacy now realized after the opening battles in Virginia and Kentucky that the North was indeed determined to fight for whatever period was necessary to gain victory. With their superiority in both manpower and materials, this was the most logical type of warfare for the North to wage. Approximately 55% of the men from the various companies of the old 9th Regiment transferred into Chalmers' new regiment.²¹ The rest returned home to form or join new units and attempt to salvage businesses and farms which had lain unattended for the past twelve months.

By 19 December, the Corinth Rifles, Company A (Old) 9th Mississippi Infantry Regiment, ceased to exist. Many of its personnel transferred into the newly formed 9th Regiment — in particularly (new) Company G, commanded by Captain Francis Eugene Whitfield (formerly captain of the Corinth Rifles from Kilpatrick's resignation on 8 September to 17 December 1861) and (New) Company F, commanded by Captain John Y. Keith (formerly a sergeant and the 2nd lieutenant of the Corinth Rifles from 30 August thru 17 December 1861). Some others, finding the



Last known photographs of the "Corinth Rifles" flag.

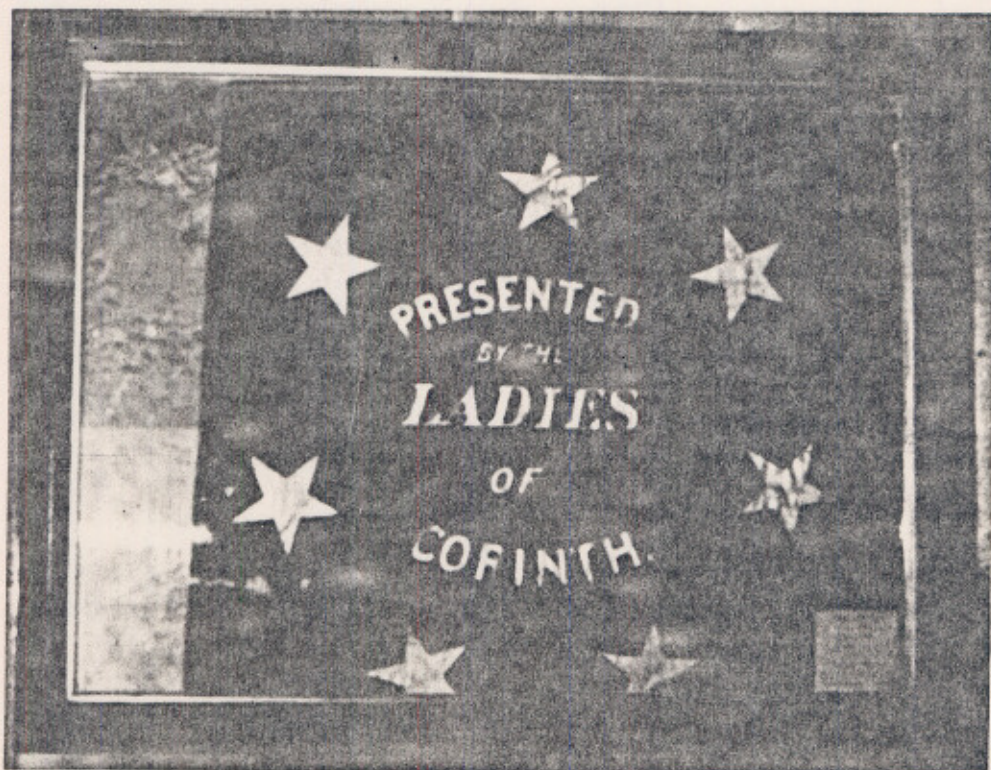


Fig. 2 and 3. Last known photographs of the "Corinth Rifles" flag taken by Col. J. L. Borroum in March 1961. They reveal the details of the hand-painted design on the obverse and reverse sides of the blue field.

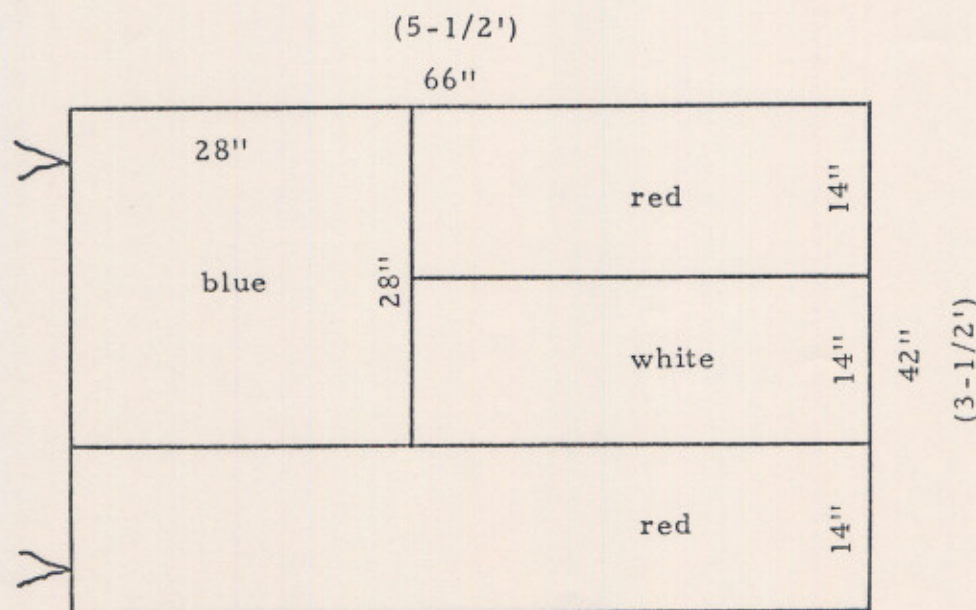
infantry a bit too tame, journeyed home and joined cavalry units, the most popular one being Company H, 10th Mississippi Cavalry under the command of another Corinthian and a former West Point cadet, William M. Inge.²²

Pvt. George W. Small, the former color-bearer of the Corinth Rifles, was no exception in looking for a greater challenge. He returned home and joined an independent cavalry troop under Lt. General N. B. Forrest with whom he served throughout the remainder of the war, participating in the battle at Selma, Ala-

bama.²³ Small brought home from Pensacola the Corinth Rifles flag, which had been entrusted to him by his comrades. It is logical to assume that a flag of the First National pattern, which had been superseded as a field flag by the spring of 1862 with the advent of the popular St. Andrews Cross style battle flag; and more specifically, one which bore an inactive unit designation (Corinth Rifles) saw no further field use. It was retired from active service, gently folded, and carefully put away to be safeguarded over the next 120 years, through three generations of the Small family.²⁴

- 1.—"Corinth, Mississippi, In Early War Days," *Confederate Veteran*, September, 1909, pp. 442-444; "Corinth, Mississippi, In War Times", *Confederate Veteran*, September, 1915, pp. 412-413 and *Source Material For Mississippi History*, Alcorn County, Vol. II, Part 1, p. 244.
- 2.—Compiled from the Confederate Military Service Records for Mississippi Troops in Possession of Mississippi Department of Archives and History.
- 3.—Op cit *Source Material for Mississippi History*; Interview of Luke Wook, City Clerk, Corinth, MS.
- 4.—Op cit Military Service Records.
- 5.—*The Corinth Herald*, "History of Old Tishomingo County", 1903.
- 6.—Conclusion based on information contained in "Corinth, Mississippi, in Early War Days", p. 442, C 1.
- 7.—Conclusion of the author based on overall time-table and logical sequence of events.
- 8.—Op cit Military Service Records and *Military History of Mississippi (Official and Statistical Register)* 1909, by Dunbar Rowland, p. 582.
- 9.—Company Muster Roll contained in Civil War Record Group 9, Vol. 5, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

- 10.—Op cit Military Service Records.
- 11.—Conclusion of author based on logical sequence of events.
- 12.—Op cit "Corinth, Mississippi, In War Times".
- 13.—Op cit *Military History of Mississippi*.
- 14.—Ibid.
- 15.—Op cit *Source Material for Mississippi* and Military Service Records.
- 16.—Minute Book of Co. F., 9th Miss. by Captain R. McGowan, CW Record, Group 9, Vol. 5, MD AH.
- 17.—Op cit *Military History of Mississippi*.
- 18.—Ibid; Op cit Military Service Records, Record Group 9, Vol. 5.
- 19.—Op cit *Military History of Mississippi*.
- 20.—Ibid.
- 21.—Ibid.
- 22.—Op cit Military Service Records and "Corinth, Mississippi, In War Times".
- 23.—*The Corinth Herald*, Wednesday, January 31, 1883, OB of G. W. Small.
- 24.—Assumption of the author based on historical facts and logic; conversation with Rev. W. C. Small.



Dimensions of "CORINTH RIFLES" Battle Flag of the First National Design.

- 1.—Marching song of the 85th Bn., CEF, composed by unknown author and sung by the tune of "When You Wore a Tulip".
- 2.—James M. Cameron, *Pictonians in Arms, A Military History of Pictou County, Nova Scotia* (University of New Brunswick, 1969), pp. 91-92.
- 3.—M. S. Hunt (ed.), *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War* (Halifax, 1920), p. 90.
- 4.—Joseph Hayes, *The Eighty-Fifth in France and Flanders* (Halifax, 1920), pp. 25-26.
- 5.—Stanfield was the owner of a large undergarment manufacturing firm. As a result, the 193rd became popularly known as "Stanfield's Hun-Shrinkables".
- 6.—Hunt, p. 123.
- 7.—Hayes, p. 45.
- 8.—Hayess, p. 27.
- 9.—The 246 CEF was formed in August 1916, but was broken up in March 1917, as reinforcements for other Canadian units, see Hunt, pp. 146-147.
- 10.—Hunt, p. 143.
- 11.—Ibid.
- 12.—Hunt, p. 128.
- 13.—Author's conversation with Private C. H. Harvey, 85 Bn., 27 November, 1981.
- 14.—Hayes, pp. 45-46. Regimental bands were not allowed on strength for units proceeding to France. The 85th also took its regimental mascot, the dog "Rowdy" whose affinity for, and success with, the four-legged mademoiselles of France became legendary.
- 15.—Major Harvey E. Crowell, 85th Bn., quoted in Alexander McKee, *Vimy Ridge* (Souvenir Press, 1966), p. 183.
- 16.—Ibid. Private John Cornish, 3rd Canadian Machine Gun Company.
- 17.—Ibid., p. 189.
- 18.—Hunt, p. 108.
- 19.—Hayes, pp. 245-246.
- 20.—Unless otherwise stated, all photographic evidence is based on the photograph collection of The Army Museum, Halifax Citadel.
- 21.—Author's conversation with LCpl. (later Major) E. P. Wainwright, 85 Bn.
- 22.—Hunt, p. 106, photos of Capt. J. M. Hensley and Lt. A. D. Fraser.
- 23.—Author's conversation with LCpl. W. P. Wainwright, 27 November, 1981.
- 24.—David J. Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion . . .* (Toronto, 1935), p. 18.
- 25.—Author's conversation with LCpl. E. P. Wainwright.
- 26.—Rene Chartrand & David Ross, *Canadian Militia Dress Regulations, 1907* (St. John, 1977), pp. 64-65; Author's conversation LCpl. E. P. Wainwright.
- 27.—Ralston to McGregor in undated newspaper clipping (probably May 1919) contained in 85th Battalion Memory Book in possession of The Army Museum; photos in Hayes, p. 48, 85.
- 28.—Hayes, p. 48.
- 29.—Ibid.
- 30.—Op. cit., note 27 above.
- 31.—Author's conversation with Private (later Lt. Col.) A. W. Mackenzie, 85 Bn., 27 November, 1981.
- 32.—Ibid.
- 33.—According to LCpl. Wainwright, the steel helmet was detested by all ranks and only worn when absolutely necessary.
- 34.—Hunt, p. 136.
- 35.—Author's conversation with Ptes. Harvey and LCpl. Wainwright, 27 November 1981.
- 36.—J. L. Summers, R. Chartrand, *Military Uniforms in Canada, 1665-1670* (Ottawa, 1981), p. 132.
- 37.—Hayes, p. 45.
- 38.—Author's conversation with LCpl. Wainwright.
- 39.—Ibid., 3 October 1981.
- 40.—The 85th Battalion, Song, see note 1 above.

